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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Uncle King,' was the ready reply; his Majesty had once indulged her with a short tête-a-tête airing in his pony phaeton which he had driven himself.

BEHNES'S BUST.

"It was shortly after this that the young Princess sat, by the King's desire, to Mr. Behnes for that masterly bust which attracted such general admiration at the exhibition of the Royal Academy. This exquisite model of loveliness and innocence now adorns the corridor of Windsor Castle, where it will probably remain for many ages a proud monument of the dignity and beauty which distinguished the infant years of England's most cherished Queen; in it is strikingly portrayed that peculiarity of carriage which characterised even the childhood of the Princess, and which is thus alluded to in a poetical address upon her ninth birthday:—

'They say e'en now thou hast a Queenly look;
And walk'st thy Palace with majestic gait,
As though each pace thy Royal footsteps took
Were conscious that it moved a thing of state:
Thy hand as if it knew a Sceptre's weight
They say doth wave;—thy brow as if it bore
A regal diadem doth look sedate;
Yet, though of dignity thou hast such store
Of sweetness infantine thou still possessest more.'

(*To be continued.*)

THE SEASONS.

"KNOWLEDGE NEVER LEARNED OF SCHOOLS."

Edited by MISS ARMITT.

MERE-FOWL.

At last,—for at last it seems, after days of driving sleet and snow, or mist and rain and darkness—there comes a morning when the whole wintry world of mountain and mere is visible again; and the lost sun appears, blinking with cheerful horizontal rays as his glowing circle peeps, about nine o'clock, above white Wansfell.

At once, and for the first time, the sentient world feels itself to be in a new year. A page in the dreariest chapter of winter is turned. There is an undefined sense of hope in the air, and a certain amount of cheerful bustle prevails among all moving creatures. Hope, yes! and expectation, though over mountain and fell a thin pall of white yet lies, through which rock and scree loom black and drear; though skies—except for the patch whence the sun so kindly smiles for a while—are a pallid grey; though the oak trees grouped majestically upon the rocky slope are as frowningly dark from rugged trunk to myriad cresting tip as the rocks themselves,—not touched with that pinky-brown hue of hope that the higher larch trees carry; though the only sound is the trickling of water about the sodden ground, or the low rumble of the swollen beck, tumbling somewhere over the upper rocks of Loughrigg, or the fall of a stone from the distant quarry, or the bark of a Raven over the scar.

Yet, in face of all these bleak signs of winter's inanimate state, what cheery sights there are among active living things, as soon as we stand to look! Here is the Dipper, that betakes itself so oddly in the winter to a lacustral life, and uses the lake as a feeding-ground almost like a Duck, only that it splashes and wriggles far more than any Duck will do; here it is, winging low along the shore, ready to alight. But where, in all this particular stretch of rushy, slushy margin, so repugnant to its stone-loving claws, will it choose a spot for settling? So! in desperation it has rushed into a large

and many-branched bush, which here breaks the monotony of the shore, and is so surprised itself at this action that it chats loud awhile, and then remains ducking its big broad body like a mechanical toy among the interlacing boughs. Its behaviour has not only flustered itself, but a Water-hen also, that was placidly picking on the sedgey shore; and the hen suddenly launches itself on the lake, twisting slightly with each stroke of its unwebbed feet, and jerking upwards with each stroke that pretty, white-lined tail of its—for its adornments are carried at each end of its dark-grey person, in a red neb, and a white-lined tail. Presently the Dipper flies from its strange perch to the placid surface, and begins afresh its rat-like squirmings up and down, above and below.

But there are other birds abroad on the bosom of the lake, in comparison with whose facile evolutions these two birds move but as unpractised amateurs upon the water. Out there by the island, where not the least ripple catches the light, and a bluish sheen tints the opaque dark-grey of the waters, is a perfect school of divers, working with an ease that lends to the getting of a livelihood at the bottom of the lake the appearance of play. It is always worth while to watch a party of winter Golden-eyes, and as this seems a larger party than usual, we idly pause to wonder how many there may be. So we count; then, as more come up—though some go down—we count again, and yet again; count repeatedly, futilely, with growing eagerness, for an arithmetical puzzle is not more baffling nor engrossing than the numbering of hungry Golden-eyes. Five; seven; ten; nine; two; six; five; ten; none! And on, and on, till the number ten being achieved three times over, we rashly conclude ten to be the limit of the party: till a long time later, when there happens to be a temporary lull in the general activity of the group, we catch thirteen birds afloat, and suspect more! The exact number remains a mystery.

Quite as illusory are single individuals as general numbers; for in a wide group of fast-swimming, oft-disappearing creatures, that now dive in a close squad to reappear scattered, or dive scattered to come up nearly upon one another's backs (how well they must see under water to avoid collision!) it is difficult to follow a single bird's action. There is, however, one particular drake, so conspicuously brilliant among all the motley band of youngsters and ducks, that it is impossible

not to note his movements. We have never done admiring him, as he takes his powerful plunge, or appears again suddenly from the depths. His well set-back head, iridescently black, has a sort of peak or cap, very masterful in effect; he carries below the golden orb of vision that gains for his species its name, a large white spot of feathers ringed in black; his lower neck and breast and high white sides gleam a miracle of whiteness, and the black feathers of his back are finished off with a deep fringe of alternate black and white, most elegant and effective; a beautiful bird indeed! When, lo! all at once, after long watching there are two such drakes upon the water! Nay, we even suspect three, but prefer, in a natural irritation at having taken three persons to be one, not to go into the matter further. The birds, in fact, are spending a longer time below the water just now than above it. Actually, when we have left the group for a few restful moments, we return to it again to find not a single bird upon the surface, and only three pale rings of light to show where the last ones went down, and to prove that below that vacant surface there are many air-breathing creatures in active motion. But before these three rings fade, some of the earlier divers are back. In fact, I have never timed the length of a Golden-eye's disappearance to last appreciably longer than half a minute, or from 27 to 31 seconds, and it goes without saying that the experiment has been made when the birds were single or close at hand; but then, its stay above, when feeding actively, lasts not a tenth of that time. Indeed, the bird comes up only to breathe. Its feeding ground is the bottom of the lake, even the deepest bottom of it, where who (that shoots not nor dissects) shall say on what it feeds? Down there lies hidden many an organic atom, vegetable or animal; dormant seeds of water-plants, such as the air-loving water-lily, that will strike upwards when the time for growing comes, of the soft trailing, translucent pondweeds that live submerged; whole acres of the flowerless, bottom-growing quillwort, that multiplies by spores, whose stiff, spiny foliage it is possible ducks may relish; myriads of tiny bivalve shells, *Cyclas corneum* by name, that nestle in the dark quillwort and stud the bottom like little golden stars; and a host of living things besides. To reach this tempting place, the bird goes down, if we may judge by the initiatory movement, by an almost perpendicular descent of great speed.

A powerful spring is made that turns its body over in a somersault; the neck strikes the water in a stiff arc (straightened, no doubt, below), and the tail, the last point above water, is seen to be fanned out stiffly. Considering the strength of the plunge, there is an astonishingly small amount of commotion in the water. With what ease and speed, too, do the birds swim, oft close together and in varying courses, yet never in each other's way!

Then, when that partial lull comes in their meal-getting, what a pretty sight it is to scan the large and varied brood! The pretty sober ducks, all brown and grey-white, with russet-brown upper neck showing ruff-like above the grey, and grey and dappled sides, and but one narrow streak of actual white upon the wing; the young drakes, with breast and ring showing fairly white, but with but a small white wing-patch yet, that gives them no claim to the bird's local name of Whitesides; the brilliant drakes, more brilliant than ever when now at ease, and one rises in the water to shake his wet wings, and another shows in preening his back feathers the alternating stretch of white neck generally hidden between his black set-back head and black back. So many differences, in sex and age, but all alike, in ease and speed, masters of their native element!

It is worth a January day's while to watch these happy winter Ducks, that nest in northern climes. It is difficult to leave them, to push farther, and find the Coots,—not as agile as they, but beyond the Water-hen and Dipper in water-power—diving just beyond the dead reed-stems. And here is another Dipper, too, squirming in the water! As we began with Bessie Douker at one end of the lake, so we finish with him—or her, at the other.

MARY L. ARMITT.

NATURE NOTES

FEBRUARY AT LUGANO.

BY MRS. DORMAN.

Nature at Lugano can as yet scarcely be said to have awaked from her winter sleep. It is often our fate to encounter the unforeseen in the way of weather; either there never was such a wet season or such a dry one, never was it so hot or so cold within the memory of man, and this

month is no exception to the rule, for after a winter that seemed like spring, spring has now turned back to winter, the mountains are white with snow down to the very plain, and a keen east wind gives one the shivers. As I write snow is falling in the streets, Monte Caprino opposite is shrouded in mist, and the rowers in the market boats are glad to stand under the shelter of their picturesque awnings. In the gardens the fan-palms are still in their winter clothes, and very comfortable they look. Three stout poles are placed at equal distances around the tree and support a thatched roof, not unlike that of an old-fashioned beehive, which affords a good protection to the dense head of leaves. The agaves are closely tied up, as if they were about to be sent on a journey, this also being done to protect the centre of the plant from injury, while their roots and those of all tender plants are well covered up with litter. A few shrubs are coming into flower, but they are quite strange to me. Before the snow came the peasants were still busy pruning and tying up the vines, which are trained here with the same freedom they enjoy in Italy, and are not bound stiffly to stakes as they are in France and Germany, and, indeed, about the Lake of Geneva. Last year's growth has been cut back to about three feet, and fastened here and there to a rough trellis, or festooned from the mulberry trees, and in time will make the most delightful arbours imaginable. Now the brown stems look dead enough, but are enlivened by the bright yellow osiers with which they are deftly fastened to their supports.

Under Monte San Salvatore, with its precipitous dolomitic peak, lie some vineyards that slope pleasantly to the morning sun, and on their grassy terraces pale primroses are scattered here and there, and beside them grows the green hellebore in greater profusion, though the plants are small, and the flowers on their thick stout stems are only a few inches above the ground. *Cavolo di lupo*, or wolf's cabbage, is the popular name of this plant, as *Fava di lupo* is that of its beautiful relative, *Helleborus niger*, which I am told grows higher up on San Salvatore. The five sepals of *H. viridis* are spreading and persistent, the petals are more numerous, but likewise green and also tubular; they sit in a circle concealed from view under the stamens, and leave all display to the more

conspicuous sepals, in fact they efface themselves, and, hidden away under the numerous stamens, spend their time in distilling honey in their tiny two-lipped inward-curving cups, for the allurements of insect visitors to the plant, for stamens and pistils not being mature at the same time, outside help is needed in the work of fertilization. The flowers are protogynous, therefore the stigmas must depend for fertilization on the pollen of older flowers. The outermost ring of stamens first dehisce and are turned away from the centre of the flower, the rest following in succession, and when all the pollen is shed they fall away, leaving the long-beaked carpels in possession.

On the eastern side of Lugano, by the sunny road that skirts the foot of Monte Brè, with its cheerful villages and pretty campanile high up on the hillside, are other grassy banks that have a southern aspect, and there grow pretty pale violets—perhaps *V. Sylvatica*—and some white ones too, as well as daisies that look wonderfully homelike, though their petals are not “crimson-tipped”; amongst them are periwinkles of a deep vivid blue, the plants small as yet, but their starry flowers lifted well up from the grass on their slender stalks. The leaves are opposite, glabrous, ovate-lanceolate and shining. The stems are trailing and the peduncles are rather long. The flower of the periwinkle is salver-shaped like that of the jasmine. The five sepals are much shorter than the tube of the corolla, which is divided above the tube into five obliquely cut lobes or segments, which are twisted in the bud. The stamens are five, and are inserted upon the tube rather more than half-way down. Their filaments are very short, and bent inwards towards the style like a knee. Above the bend, either the filament is dilated to the width of the anthers, or the connective is prolonged downwards as it is upwards, something like the stamen of *Pinus sylvestris*. The pistil is as elaborate in structure as the stamens. The stigma proper is a ring, below the tuft of hairs which surmounts it, and the form and size of the ring are such, that it makes a regular plug in the centre of the flower, and together with the stamens almost completely closes the corolla tube. The knees of the stamens meet under the stigmatic ring, their anthers open above it and inwards, and their hairy connectives overarch and

conceal from view the whole of the pistil, if one looks into the tube from above. At the base of the columnar style are two brownish bodies, which are nectaries, and these being removed, we find that the ovary is formed of two connate carpels, which contain numerous ovules. If ever a flower took pains to protect itself from unwelcome visitors, and endeavoured to guide the welcome guest to the banqueting-hall by the proper passages, the periwinkle is that flower! It is not so easy to see what all the fuss is about, but at any rate one can study the internal arrangements if a portion of the corolla-tube be torn away. First we have the stamens dehiscing just above the stigmatic ring, and their knees meeting underneath it and enclosing it in a sort of box. The anthers overarch the hairy brush of the stigma, which blocks up the centre and forbids entrance by that way; but it is plain, that without outside assistance it will not be easy for the masses of pollen to get themselves transferred to the stigmatic ring, and we find that the only passage to the nectaries is by the narrow space between the filaments, all other interstices being completely blocked up by the hairs which line the tube itself. No insect that is not furnished with a good long proboscis can hope to reach the nectaries, so well protected are they from robbery; but a humble-bee when sucking the honey would at the same time touch both pollen and stigma and so fertilize the flower. Kerner has a special name for this peculiar and ingenious arrangement, which is brought to great perfection in the Periwinkle family, but I cannot remember it.

February 27th. The snow has disappeared from the sunny banks under Monte Brè, and the periwinkles have come up again smiling, as if nothing had happened to disturb them; and there are many more primroses than before. Let us hope the snow will not cover them again this spring, if indeed spring can be said to have commenced.